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UNCLAS RANGOON 001409

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SUBJECT: THE ROUND-UP CONTINUES: MORE NLD ACTIVISTS PUT
BEHIND BARS.....AGAIN

REF: RANGOON 1257

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: The SPDC's round-up of the NLD's elected Members of Parliament continues, with more jail sentences and general harassment. An estimated 150 of the original 392 elected members remain free, but most of them have left their home communities and are living sub-rosa around Rangoon. End Summary

12. (SBU) In northern Shan State, local authorities succeeded in getting Sai Tun Aung of the Shan NLD to quit his post in early August. However, U Than Htay, an elected MP from Lashio, resisted the pressure. This led local authorities to arrest him in mid-August on four trumped-up charges involving the "illegal" sales of audio visual equipment and a cordless telephone. Both were purchased from a legally registered electronic shop that belonged to Than Htay's son, who was detained at the same time. On October 25, father and son were both sentenced to five years in jail and hard labor plus fines of kyat 20,000 (approximately USD 20). Two drivers who worked at the son's shop were also arrested and sentenced to three months in jail.

13. (SBU) In another recent case, U Thet Wai, chairman of the NLD in Sanchaung Township, Rangoon Division, was picked up on September 21 and charged with, "inciting the general public to cause disorder that can affect government or public peace and tranquillity." In fact, his crime was his friendship with U Ohne Thant (see below), the lone protester who was arrested in front of the United Nations Development Program's office in Rangoon on September 21 (reftel). On October 25, U Thet Wai was sentenced to two years in jail.

14. (SBU) As for U Ohne Thant, he too was sentenced on October 25 to two years in jail by a Special Tribunal inside Insein Prison. U Ohne Thant is not a member of the NLD, but had close personal ties to U Thet Wai. He has also been very active over the years with Burmese students.

15. (SBU) Comment: The Government is clearly targeting the NLD's elected Members of Parliament. Estimates of the numbers in this group vary, depending on whether those who have "resigned" or been "deregistered" (total of 170) are counted. The NLD, which has expelled 25 of its own elected members for disciplinary reasons, does not recognize "resignations" or "deregistrations" on the grounds that only Parliament has the authority to accept such changes. A close observer of this ever shifting group estimates that 150 of the 392 who were elected to Parliament from the NLD in 1990 are still active. Most members of the group have left their home communities and are thought to be living sub-rosa in or around greater Rangoon. End comment.
Martinez